

Prepare For Battle

by mystifyre

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Summary: Every night proves to be a futile battle against peace and war, her dreams and her emotions. And she knows only too well which will rise victorious. Every time.

## 1. Chapter 1

\*\*Title:\*\* Prepare for Battle

\*\*Fandom:\*\* 2009 revival of Hair, the musical

\*\*Rating:\*\* PG-13, for angst

\*\*Word Count:\*\* 1,206

\*\*Author Note: This is my Hair fanfic debut, dedicated to the lovely Renee-chan, whose fanfics inspired me to begin writing my own. Funny enough, my first 'fic turned out to be full of angstâ€|she's definitely influenced my writing! :P Enjoy! \*\*

War. Even just the uttering of the word sent shivers of dread reverberating down her spine. Nothing good could come out of it; the only outcome was pain and sorrow. Yes, there could be victory, but it would come with a heavy price. The sacrifice of life. Bloodshed.

Lately, everyone had been tiptoeing around the subject like a herd of deer around a sleeping tiger, as if at any moment it could spring into life and consume them. And it would do so slowly, mercilessly tearing and breaking them apart, piece-by-piece, until there was nothing left to reveal. Nothing but the raw, bare bones of the Tribe, left exposed. Without their flesh, there was nothing to hold them all together; to protect them. The result would be devastating. Once more, this battle, this conflict, would steal away what they all loved the most, leaving a gaping wound that would drain every last drop of blood...until there was no more left to pump to the heart. And without their heart â€" their leader â€" the Tribe would

die.

With these thoughts plaguing her mind - and she not having the strength to thrust them away â€“ the girl realized her fight with sleeplessness was futile. Yet her body was crying for the soft mattress, wracked with exhaustion. She ached, head to toe. Her eyes were bleary; the telltale shadows now bold and amplified. Every night, she had crawled into bed and begged desperately for sleep to consume her. But, just as she felt herself begin to drift away, these evil thoughts would snatch her, creep into her dreams and take her for a ride, plunging her into the unspeakable horrors of the front line. And tonight, just like every other night this week, she woke up screaming, her sheets soaked with sweat, her cheeks burning with her tears. Now, having gained her composure once more, she sat on the edge of the bed and contemplated her options.

And there weren't many.

She knew there was bound to be a stash of sleeping pills somewhere in her apartment, but the very thought of having to rummage through every cupboard and drawer made her want to cry. Also, and quite remarkably at that, she'd managed to become less reliant on drugs these past few months, and although she was desperately trying to find a cure for her insomnia, she knew deep down heading down the road of sedatives was not the way to go. Hell, she knew a joint would surely calm her, but the effects were only temporary. No, she needed something more sustainable, something to release these demons from their chains in her mindâ€|

As she sat, her knees pulled up to her chin, for a few more moments, a thought dawned on her. She was alone. Ever since the stark reality of the war had hit, Berger had been spending more and more time away from the apartment, leaving her to suffer in the silence. There was no one for her to confide in.

Then, as if her despair had been heard miles away, there was a gentle knock at the door. The girl padded down the hallway and gingerly peeked through the peephole. Jeanie. She had an uncanny sense of knowing when something was wrong within the Tribe. She often sensed issues arising well before they could reach the surface. It was just the person she needed; someone who had the patience and compassion to sit and hear her out and relate to how she felt.. Proceeding to unlatch the chain on the door, the girl ushered the other inside. Suddenly, she was enveloped in a comforting embrace.

"I was just thinking about you,"

Jeanie pulled away and looked at her with sympathetic eyes. All the evidence she needed was there on the girl's face. She pulled her down to the sofa.

"Sheila, sweetie, I wish you would have said something soonerâ€|"

The older girl shrugged. "I'm not the only one finding it difficult. I just figured we were all in the same boat, you know?"

At that, Jeanie allowed the girl to rest her head wearily on her shoulder as she gently stroked her long, blonde hair.

"We are, but most of us can get a good night's sleep once in a while,"

Sheila sighed quietly. Oh, how she wished she could be someone elseâ€|Crissy, Woof, Dionneâ€|anyone else just to get some rest. Somehow she couldn't picture them being tortured by nightmaresâ€|

"You have no idea how much I just want to close my eyes and find peace, Jeanie. Butâ€|all I see are guns, bombs and Claudeâ€|."

She found herself cut off by a deep sob as it erupted from her mouth, as tears began to trail down her cheeks.

"I'm so scared, Jeanie,"

Jeanie cradled the girl, rocking her back and forth. Even she had to admit that the very same images haunted her. Ever since Claude had received his draft card, it seemed all that filled her ears were the screams of wounded soldiers and the sprays of bullets.

"I know. I'm scared too," she admitted, desperately trying to keep her voice from shaking. It was unusual seeing Sheila so torn up. She was usually the strong one, the member of the Tribe whose feelings were always kept in check, enclosed behind a brick wall so few could break. Until now. Now, that wall had crumbled, leaving her emotions exposed and defenceless.

"Every day I think how there is the possibility that Claude will never come back. And Bergerâ€|G-d Bergerâ€|it'll kill him," Sheila sobbed.

This, Jeanie knew too. Already she could sense that Berger was becoming more detached from them by the day, preferring to spend the majority of his time beneath the bridge in Central Park, drowning his sorrows with a cocktail of alcohol and drugs. If that didn't kill him, she was almost certain Claude's absence would.

"This can't be an easy situation for Claude either, and we need to remember that. We have to stay strong for him and for Berger," Jeanie sighed. "We can pull through this together,"

But even though she uttered those words, she wasn't reassured by them. Yet, she continued to soothe the older girl until her tears subsided. Then, Sheila sat upright and gave a short laugh that lifted their misery.

"Surprisingly, I feel so much better!"

Jeanie smiled softly. "That's because you've finally released all those horrible feelings that you've been bottling up for far too long! Now, come on, let's try and get you some beauty sleep,"

With that, Jeanie helped Sheila change the wet sheets and saw the exhausted girl clamber into bed, her tense body beginning to relax as it sank into the mattress. She perched herself on the edge of the bed and gently stroked the girl's hair as she drifted off.

"We'll get through this, Sheila. I promise," she whispered.

For another half hour, she kept a watchful eye, before she quietly picked up the spare key from its hook and slipped out the door, assured her friend had finally sank into a peaceful slumber.

We'll take each day as it comes, she thought, as she strolled back to join Crissy and Woof in the Park.

One day at a time.

## 2. Chapter 2

\*\*Title:\*\* Prepare For Battle

\*\*Fandom:\*\* 2009 revival of Hair, the musical

\*\*Rating:\*\* PG-13 for angst

\*\*Words:\*\* 1,857

\*\*Author's Note: Thank you to everyone who has been reading, reviewing and putting my story on alert! It means a lot. :D Well, all I can really say for this chapter is: welcome back to Angsville! You have been warned. Enjoy!\*\*

Fear seeped deep into every part of his body, deep down to the core. His heart, pounding fiercely in his chest, was like a panicked bird, its wings battering against the metal cage in which it was trapped: desperate to escape. He'd opened his eyes to discover himself crumpled on the dusty ground of a large field. For a second, he'd thought himself alone, before a petrifying, high-pitched scream filled his ears. Then, a blast. A wave of shrapnel sprayed around him like darts as he cowered on the ground, burying his head into the hot soil. Blazing hot metal pierced his skin and the overwhelming bloom of heat from the explosion scorched through his shirt. Panicked, he stumbled to his feet and did the only thing he could think of. Run. "Just keep running and eventually you'll run out of ground. Keep running, and you'll escape from this hellhole," he thought. As his feet thrashed the soil beneath them, his throat ached for more air. Faltering, he slowed his pace. With an arm, he wiped away the beads of sweat pouring down his face, gulping down more air.

"Bukowski!"

Turning to find the owner of the unfamiliar voice, Claude was met with searing pain. He gripped his abdomen and as his eyes lowered to investigate the source of his agony, a wave of nausea struck him down. His hands were crimson. Blood. Struggling to keep his breathing in check as it began to ooze through his shirt, he forced himself to continue running. He had to get back to them. He just had to. Soon, his vision began hazy, pricked with harsh tears. Tears of realization that he would never again skinny dip with Berger in Central Park's pond in the Summer heat, never again hold Sheila tightly in his embrace and taste her sweet kisses as they enveloped his, never again hear Jeanie's infectious laugh and feel the rare silkiness of her flaxen hair as it tickled his cheek. He would never even get to see the child that she bore. A child which could possibly be hisâ€|

More shots showered around him, yet he continued to run until one

final blow forced him to surrender. As he collapsed to meet the ground, he remembered the last words he shared with Berger before he left him and the Tribe:

"Berger, promise me that you'll look after them while I'm gone. Promise me!"

He remembered the deep sorrow in Berger's eyes as he met his. Then, his choked reply:

"I can't do that, Claude," he shook his head. "I can't promise that,"

Of course he couldn't promise that, Claude thought now, how could he when he himself was falling apart? He shouldn't have left them! It was then that his vision rapidly deteriorated, his surroundings mixing together like a child's vague painting. He was trapped on this spinning, warped rollercoaster.

Head still reeling, he was plunged into darkness.

\* \* \*

><p>"Sheila!"<p>

That voice, so distant, calling her name. It seemed distorted, echoing through her ears, like she was submerged underwater. There was nothing but the darkness that veiled her and that familiar voice. Then, a body of a man, still and lifeless, appeared before her. Her stomach lurched, coiling itself tighter and tighter as she drew closer to him. Taking a deep breath, she found the courage to reach out a trembling hand to touch his stone cold arm. The limp body rolled over to reveal his bloodied face, disfigured with scars and burns. His vacant eyes met hers,

Horrified, she stumbled back and fell and, as she cowered back further, she was almost glad that the tears brimming in her eyes were deforming her vision. Suddenly, the corpse's head shifted to face her and from his mouth, he uttered a single word that rendered her speechless.

"Sheila!"

It was then she emitted a scream and her eyes flew open. She found herself gasping for air, her throat choked up with her sobs. Disorientated, she glanced around frantically.

"Sheilaâ€|it's ok."

A reassuring hand touched her shoulder. Sheila flinched at the physical contact and turned to meet the concerned eyes of the curly blonde haired girl next to her.

"Jeanieâ€|" she breathed in relief.

As the girl caressed her hair comfortingly, Sheila closed her eyes and concentrated on taking slow, deliberate breaths to calm herself. When she opened her eyes again, however, she noticed that her hands were still trembling.

"I saw him, Jeanieâ€|I saw Claudeâ€|he wasâ€| "

She stumbled over her words, unnerved by the corpse whose form was now engrained on the backs of her eyelids. Jeanie hushed her before she could continue and drew her close. Sheila lightly rested her head against the girl's shoulder and allowed herself a moment to regain her composure.

"It was awful, Jeanie," she sighed. "I just can't seem to escape theseâ€|horrible nightmares."

Jeanie shifted beneath her. "It seems Claude can't leave any of us alone,"

Sheila, surprised at this revelation, turned to the younger girl and gave her full attention.

"You have dreams about him too?"

Jeanie nodded solemnly.

"I never used to, but now they are becoming more and more frequent. Crissy and Hud even admitted to me the other day that they were spooked. He's plaguing all of our mindsâ€| "

Sheila glanced skywards.

"Maybe he doesn't want to be forgotten?"

"He's gotta creepy way of showing it, if that's the case!"

At that, both girls found a rare moment of light laughter. Curious as to the source of this beautiful sound, several of the Tribe members nearby stirred and glanced over. Hud eyed them warily.

"Hey, what have you guys been smoking?"

At that, both girls looked at each other and burst into another fit of giggles. At that, Hud grinned and shook his head in mock dismay.

"You two are really something."

Finally, Jeanie pulled herself together and said soberly:

"We haven't been smoking anything!" she hesitated. "Sorry we woke you."

Hud waved it off with a hand. "That's alright, girl. To be honest, it was music to my ears."

Then, the park fell silent once more. Sheila could feel her eyes becoming heavy and although she knew there was a bed waiting for her back at her apartment, she now felt too comfortable to move from beside Jeanie. The younger girl kept a watchful eye as Sheila drifted off and lay silent, listening to her rhythmic, calm breathing. It was now Jeanie who could not sleep.

\* \* \*

><p>Hours later, Jeanie still lying on the grass of Central Park, gazed up at the luminescent moon, thinking of Claude. Tonight it was a crescent and so perfectly defined that it looked like a piece of the black night sky had been carefully carved out, revealing the bright white beneath its dark cloak. She wondered if Claude could see it from wherever he was right now. Whether he was thinking of her, of the Tribe. As she continued to scan the blanket of moon and stars above her, as if searching for a sign, she recounted the last conversation she had had with him.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Claude had striven to stay optimistic and upbeat as he took the time to say goodbye to each of the Tribe members. He wanted to make this farewell a little easier and he knew the best way of doing that was to remain resilient on the outside, even if inside he was weeping. But by the time he reached Jeanie he was beginning to crumble as the waves of sorrow took its toll, eroding him on the outside now too as well as the inside. She had thrown her arms around him and hugged him tightly, terrified to let him go. The star reality of the war that Claude was away to be deployed to had finally hit home. And it hit hard. She knew deep down in her aching heart that she may never see him again, and with that thought, came the sting of the truth.<p>

"Please don't go," she whispered, her head now burrowed into his shoulder.

Jeanie felt a pang of guilt as the words escaped her mouth. It was no longer her brain talking; it was the wrenching heart that was beating so loudly inside her chest. She knew it wasn't making the situation any easier for him to bear. Yet, it seemed her emotions had taken the reigns and were now leading her on.

"I'm sorry, Jeanie. I wish I didn't have to."

The blonde broke away and stared into his eyes, pleadingly.

"Then why do you have to?"

Claude noted the quivering of the girl's voice as she blurted out those words. It was then that the damn inside her broke, unleashing all of her true emotions and overwhelming her. She dissolved into tears. Claude had not braced himself for this, for he too was now straining to keep his composure. His lip trembled, yet he managed to swallow the sob that was threatening to erupt and enveloped the younger girl in another warm, comforting embrace. They remained like that, Claude cradling Jeanie as she sobbed uncontrollably, for several moments.

"I need to do this, Jeanie," he muttered finally, gently stroking her hair. "I need to show my parents that I'm worth something, that I can do something good with my life. I haven't exactly been the prized son for them. Ever since I made the decision to drop out of schoolâ€œI've felt like a let down to them. This is my chance to show them that I can do them proudâ€œdo you and the others proud,"

He sighed before continuing.

"It's not like I had much choice in the matter. I was a reckless fool

dropping out of school. I was only thinking about the freedom from all that damned work, I wasn't thinking about the fact I could be drafted!"

"You could have burnt your draft card, Claude!" Jeanie sobbed as she pulled away once more, anger now fuelling her words.

Claude scoffed. "And what? Live in worry that I'd be found out and thrown into jail?"

"It would have been better than seeing you go like this, knowing that you might never come back!"

Her words stabbed at him and left a throbbing wound. He hesitated, staring into the girl's red-rimmed eyes. All that was there was pain and anguish. He reached out and took her cold, shaking hands into his.

"Please, I need to do this. For my parents. For the Tribe," he paused. "For you,"

He moved closer to her.

"And you know what?" he lifted her chin up with his finger so that her brown eyes met his, and wiped away a tear trailing down her cheek. "I know you'll look after everyone while I'm gone. Berger, Sheila, Crissy, hell even crazy Woof!"

At that remark, Jeanie let out a choked laugh. Claude smiled.

"And I'll know you'll take good care of this little one too."

He rested a hand on her swollen stomach. At that, Jeanie embraced him once more.

"I love you, Claudio," she murmured.

Claude had grinned and planted a gentle kiss on the girl's head.

"I love you too, Jeanie,"

### 3. Chapter 3

\*\*Title:\*\* Prepare For Battle

\*\*Fandom:\*\* 2009 revival of Hair, the musical

\*\*Rating:\*\* PG-13 for angst

\*\*Words:\*\* 1,313

\*\*Author's Note: Thank you once more for reading and alerting my story. Sorry I have been slow with this next instalment. I hope you all enjoy and please review. :) I have a sequel to this story planned and partially written, so keep your eyes peeled for it in the near future.\*\*

\*\*Three months later\*\*.

Gazing out longingly onto the horizon watching the glorious sun rise to take its rightful place in the vast, azure sky above, the girl momentarily let her soul drift away with the morning breeze. The familiar pang of sorrow was tugging at her heart as it had done for the last 91 days. It was like a balloon, filled with air that made her stomach ache. Now, like every other day, she would spend a moment to release it from its bindings. Jeanie took a deep breath and, for just one moment, closed her eyes and allowed reality to slip away. She opened her mind only to let it the birds that chirped their sweet harmonies overhead, the entwining fresh fragrance of magnolia, gardenia and jasmine that enveloped her in a soothing shawl, the sun's light and warmth that blessed her skin. Precious memories that she cherished flashed in front of her like containing exuberant laughter and honest smiles. This corner of her mind was her sanctuary; the place where she could retreat to and be free from the harsh truths of the city. A place where the air was unpolluted by this cruel reality, where she could breathe when the city became too claustrophobic and suffocating.

The news of Claude's death in Vietnam had crushed her. It had been something that was impossible to prepare for, despite the fact that the whole Tribe realised the possibility that Claude may never return. They had built up their hopes and prayers regardless. Little did they know that they were protecting their hearts with soft sand walls too close to the water, which had resulted in them being ill-prepared for the bitter taste and the sting that it would bring to the fresh wounds the news inflicted. So, when the wave finally hit, their hopes were immediately destroyed. Jeanie had sensed that Claude would die when she had embraced him in farewell. At the time, she had dismissed it as anxiety; that tight, sinking, sickening knot that had developed in her stomach. Later, she realised all too late that the knot was her mind telling her to cling on tight to what she had. And she had let it go. It had taken all of her strength to keep somewhat composed at this notion. She had never revealed it to the Tribe. How could she?

That same evening, Jeanie had slipped away from the Tribe at the park to take a stroll and be alone with her thoughts. Assured that she was far away from everyone, she unleashed all her emotions that had been overwhelming her. She had been angry at Claude for making the decision to leave, angry at him for inflicting this pain on them all, angry at him for just about everything. Yet, once the storm had passed, all that had remained was guilt. She had curled up beneath Winterdale Arch and cried until Crissy came across her. The young red-head had braved a soft smile in understanding and had joined her side, resting her head of Jeanie's shoulder. "I miss him, too," she had whispered. Jeanie only tried to return a smile in response. Not even Crissy could understand why she was truly crying.

As she snapped open her eyes, unnerved by the memory of Claude, Jeanie allowed the tears to cascade down her cheeks once more. Her eyes fell and locked onto the pair of twinkling forget-me-not eyes that stared back at her. One look into those eyes gave her hope and forced her to look at things from a new perspective. They were all she needed to remind herself why she needed to stay rooted to reality; her justification to move on and teach her pining heart to love again. Cradling the child, she reached out a finger to soothingly stroke his soft cheek, and the contact ignited a spark inside her; a hint of happiness that she thought has been buried deep under the debris of her once carefree life. And although she craved

to taste that sweetness again, she knew that the only way it could ever be was to march on. There would be no chance to salvage it if she dropped everything and left. Nevertheless, it would never quite be the same. For now, she had responsibilities. Her son depended solely on her to thrive.

She recalled the very day her eccentric sixteen-year-old self had stumbled back to her parents' home, delightfully tipsy and borderline stoned, and had dropped the bombshell. Her father, a hard-working, proud man who worked in the construction industry, had instantly thrown verbal abuse around the room. Her mother was also quick to show disapproval, but took a more softer approach to the situation. Nevertheless, her father took charge and did not hesitate to throw her out, repeatedly telling her that she was "a disgrace beyond imagination". Unfortunately, gleefully high on drugs, Jeanie had not fully realised the consequences until the following day when she unashamedly cried until she was numb and empty. Her reckless actions had meant losing her parents. The only small sign that her mother still cared was her sending money once a month.

She knew that Samuel was not Claude's. Yet that didn't stop her from seeing that very same playful sparkle in her son's eyes, the same blonde hair that lay in curls on the crown of his head. As she touched his hand and kissed it softly, Jeanie decided that she should write to her parents and let them know about him. Her parents may have disapproved, but she could not deny them the right to know of their grandson. She may not be able to mend the broken ties with her own mother and father but she was determined to be the best she could be for Samuel's sake. She may have failed them, but she would not fail her son.

"Hey Jeanie! Sheila not with you?"

Berger stumbled up the steps to the apartment's small landing. Jeanie lowered her eyes.

"No,"

"She's probably ran off to D.C. to chase her dreams," Berger said mockingly, leaning lazily against the wall. Ever since Claude had gone, he'd become spiteful.

"And so what if she has?" the girl snapped back, leaping to her feet.

Berger stumbled back, stunned by the defense.

"I say good for her! She has sense, Berger. She has so much potential that I don't think she even realised. I would have hated seeing her stay here and let it all go to waste!".

At this, Berger snorted.

"Face it, Jeanie. She's a coward. She ran away. If only it was so easily for all of us to take the easy way out like that whenever we felt insecure, scared!" he stated snarkily, his word filled with poison.

"You know what your problem is?" the younger girl took a step towards him, so she was looking him right in the eye. "You were just hoping

that you could rely on her. You were so consumed in your own little world that you never acknowledged how she felt. You didn't even love her, Berger. She loved you and you never returned it. Do you know how much that must have hurt?"

"Then why did she never say that?"

As Berger raised his voice, Samuel began to squirm in discomfort and cry.

"How could she? She never wanted to hurt you, Berger. And when Claude left, she knew that she couldn't give you anything that you wanted. When Claude diedâ€œ!" Jeanie hesitated, biting her lip. "When Claude died, a part of you went with him,"

She looked straight into his eyes, the tears threatening once more. "Sheila realised then that she could never be enough for you, could never be loved by you, because you loved Claude,"

Her voice broke on the last few words and at that, she held Samuel close and retreated indoors.

#### 4. Chapter 4

\*\*Title:\*\* Prepare For Battle

\*\*Fandom:\*\* 2009 revival of Hair, the musical

\*\*Rating:\*\* PG-13 for angst

\*\*Words:\*\* 1,485

\*\*Author's Note: Thank you, as always, to the lovely people who continue to read my work. In particular, a special thanks goes out to Jadelphe, who has really made me smile with her reviews. This next instalment is for you. :) As usual, I enjoy my angst, so there is some still going throughout, although I do promise there is some sunshine! Enjoy!\*\*

Mornings were Jeanie's time to escape. Nights, on the other hand, was when she concentrated on locking herself in. With the peace of mind that Samuel was sleeping peacefully in his wooden crib, the young girl began her nightly routine to ensure the house was secure. Crissy watched in silence from the bedroom as she methodically checked each room â€œ for what she did not know â€œ before, seemingly satisfied, proceeding to open the door, shut it and turn the key, pulling it out once she heard the reassuring "click" of the lock hitting home. Then, she firmly pulled down on the handle several times, just for good measure. Sheila had briefly mentioned that Jeanie had become more attentive to the door lock since Samuel's birth, but it seemed it had been exacerbated by her sudden departure. It pained Crissy to see her friend so consumed by worry and self-doubt that she felt so insecure in her own home, especially when she used to be so carefree and confident. She recalled the innumerable nights they used to spend out in Central Park, stargazing and reminiscing until they drifted off. Even then, they had felt strangely safe, the Tribe sleeping together, completely exposed, with only the twinkling stars and the luminescent moon as their blanket. It was hard to imagine it now.

Seemingly settled, Jeanie returned to the bedroom and a ghost of a smile flickered on her lips. The redhead noted the dull shadows lingering beneath her brown eyes; the once playful sparkle long extinguished, the way her shoulders slouched wearily, as if the burden was physically too heavy to bear. Gently, Jeanie collected the soft bundle of Samuel wrapped carefully in a blanket, and joined Crissy in bed.

"I'm glad you came around," she said softly, shifting position to lie on her side, propping her head up with one hand, the other protectively curled around Samuel, resting against her chest. "It's nice to have some company."

The room was lit only by the soft glow of the bedside lamp by Crissy, and it seemed to give the room a relaxed atmosphere. It was rectangular in shape, the bed suitably placed in the middle, with the bay window to the left and the large wardrobe to the right. Sheila had tastefully decorated it in a calming powder blue, accompanied by a springy beige carpet. She had found it quite therapeutic. Sheila had not hesitated to give the house a cosy feel, with a feather-soft crimson throw draped on the sofa, in the lounge, accompanied by a cream Persian rug underneath the coffee table. Much to Berger's distaste, Sheila's penchant for flowers became evident, with orchids and chrysanthemums and lilies adorning most of the few surfaces she had. It had seemed that Jeanie had left the house untouched, in hope of preserving the essence of Sheila for as long as possible and so, if she did choose to return, she'd still have her familiar home to greet her.

Both Claude and Sheila had left their mark on them all.

"Me too." She smiled brightly.

The urge to ask the question that had lain dormant amongst the Tribe for some time was becoming surprisingly unbearable. It was none of their business but there was something beguiling about having confirmation to placate their curiosity. She sighed, praying she did not upset or offend her friend. She touched the young girl's hand.

"Jeanie, is Samuel-?"

"I don't know," she admitted, gazing mournfully down at her sleeping child, her voice wavering. She reached for the lamp switch. "But, either way, he'll never meet his father."

\* \* \*

><p>The following morning, the optimistic girl was in full "Aunty Crissy" mode. She'd risen early, woken by the bright sunlight penetrating through the roller blinds. Jeanie had still been asleep, her wild blonde curls spilling over her pillow, Samuel still tucked in by her side. Surprisingly, he seemed quite content there; his curious blue eyes scanning his surroundings in silent wonder. He was a quiet boy, and Crissy suspected he would grow up to be an affable, easy-going kid. She took comfort in this, as she appreciated it would be difficult for Jeanie to raise and support a child independently. A low grumble erupted from Samuel's stomach; breakfast call. Delicately, as if moving around a sleeping lioness with her cub, she scooped him into her arms so as not to disturb Jeanie, and pulled the

duvet up over her shoulders. Bouncing the baby on her hip, Crissy padded into the kitchen to prepare his formula milk. She'd watched Jeanie intently the day before, so that today she would know exactly what to do. Settling down on the sofa with Samuel whilst he drank enthusiastically from his bottle, she took a moment to take the baby in. Tuffs of flaxen blonde hair were beginning to grow thick on his head. He had inherited his mother's warm, bright brown eyes. Just like every other baby, his curiosity and eagerness to learn meant he scrutinised everything that surrounded him like he was in Aladdin's cave of wonders, grabbing and playing with anything that held his interest. Finished his bottle, he began to grasp strands of her hair, fascination written all over his face. Crissy laughed. Samuel had rekindled a light inside of her; a feeling she couldn't quite find the words to describe. Just cradling the child made her happy.<p>

Just then, a flustered Jeanie scrambled from the bedroom and, seeing the pair on the sofa, she stopped in her tracks. Crissy watched as the anxiety slipped from her face, washed over by relief and realisation. An honest smile wiped across her face and she immediately relaxed, watching her son, safe and well, squealing with delight as Crissy bounced him up and down on her knee. It suddenly dawned on her that she needn't be fearful; her anxiety was irrational, she had friends who truly cared and loved Samuel just as much as she did and she realised that her son brought so much happiness to everyone who was around him. How could she deny them that? She'd been so wrapped up in her unjustified worries that she'd been reluctant to share him, let him out of her sight. But just seeing her friend so animated with him changed everything. The demons needed to be released from their chains.

"I know I've been a bit of a control freak." She joined Crissy on the sofa, stroking the boy's head in fondness.

"I think it's pretty understandable, considering what's happened in the past three months. Besides," the red head placed a reassuring hand on Jeanie's. "Aren't all moms meant to be protective?"

They share a light-hearted giggle and, in that moment, Jeanie makes a decision.

"Let's take Samuel to the park this afternoon. I'm sure Uncle Hud and Aunt Dionne will love the surprise!"

\* \* \*

><p>Though she hated to admit it now, throughout her pregnancy Jeanie had yearned for a girl. She wanted the promise of safety, and with a son, there was always going to be the prospect of her child having to sign up to a war, if there happened to be another. After Claude, it tore her apart thinking that the child she carried might be born to grow up with a fate of an early grave ahead of him. Yet, finding herself with a son, she'd realised that, although she could have Samuel avoid conscription, she could not keep him wrapped in cotton wool forever. He would have to spread his wings at some point, make his own choices and live his life. Shoving the thoughts aside, Jeanie decided she would just have to use this as a reason to enjoy the time she had with him growing up. It was partly this reason why she finally joined the Tribe back in the park, just like how they used to, and let Samuel be spoiled and coddled like any other

kid.<p>

"Hey, look! It's the little man!" cried Hud, as Jeanie approached with Crissy and Samuel.

He immediately sat upright from his lying position effortlessly, grinning from cheek to cheek. Arms outstretched, Samuel began to squirm with glee.

"He sure knows when he's getting all the attention," Jeanie smirked, shaking her head, placing him into Hud's arms.

Lifting him into the air, above his head, Hud savoured the moment of being "Uncle Hud". The child's laughter piqued the interest of the rest of the Tribe.

"My, Jeanie, ain't he gettin' big?" Dionne approached with a warm smile, lightly tickling Samuel's stomach.

Samuel relished in all the attention, his bright eyes sparkling with joy as he was snuggled, tickled and played with. It was evident that he instilled colour into the shades of grey that had shadowed the Tribe in their mourning. With death came the birth of new life, with the need to be nurtured and loved.

Samuel was their opportunity to make a fresh start.

## 5. Chapter 5

\*\*Title:\*\* Prepare For Battle

\*\*Fandom:\*\* 2009 revival of Hair, the musical

\*\*Rating:\*\* PG-13 for angst

\*\*Words:\*\* 877

\*\*Author's Note: Thank you once more for all those who continue to read my work, especially to the wonderful Jadelphe whose reviews always make my day. This final chapter is shorter than the rest but will lead nicely onto the sequel, which I'll post the first instalment to in the next few days. All I can say is: prepare for more angst! Enjoy!\*\*

\*\*15 months later\*\*

Jeanie stirred on the bed of lush grass in Central Park, amongst the shroud of rust, ochre and burnt orange. Autumn was now in full swing and the chilly winter air was already hinting with its harsh bite through the air. On either side of her, still lost in peaceful sleep, was Hud and Woof. But something wasn't right. Something was unsettling her; a sharp panic boiled and rised in the pit of her stomach like a ball of elastic bands threatening to snap. She hadn't intended on falling asleep for so long. She'd merely closed her eyes momentarily and had subconsciously fallen into a deep slumber. How much time had past?

It was too quiet.

She recalled hearing Samuel's joyful, tinkling laughter as he played with a ball some kid had probably left behind after a game of kick-about. Having just recently mastered being able to walk independently, he had been eager and had become fascinated by throwing the ball a short distance before walking over to retrieve it. Hud and Woof, watching with Jeanie from afar, chuckled as the boy repeatedly demonstrated his newfound skill. Now, the ball was by the base of a nearby oak tree. Samuel was nowhere in sight.

Heart racing and filled with anxiety, she violently shook awake Hud and Woof.

"Samuel's gone!"

Frustrated by their laziness in awaking, the girl rose to her feet and scanned the park from where she stood. Finally, Woof groggily stood up.

"What's the fuss about, Jeanie? He's probably with Dionne and the girls or something! Quit worrying! You wrap that kid up in cotton wool!"

Jeanie felt something snap, then. She could no longer keep her panic and frustration in check.

"You were supposed to be watching him!" her voice trembled.

Aghast, Woof was quick to fire back. "Me? You're his mother!"

Shaking his head, Hud took the role of referee and separated the two with his muscular arms.

"Look, both of you quit it! We aren't going to get anywhere if you two start beatin' at each other," He gave the pair a serious look before relaxing and turning to Jeanie. "He can't have wandered too far, Jeanie. We'll find him, alright?"

Despite Hud's reassuring words, the girl couldn't relax. Samuel may only be eighteen months of age, but he was now gaining confidence on his feet. There were far too many dangers for a wandering child, even in a park. What if someone had coaxed him to take their hand and walk away with them? What if he'd got lost and had stumbled out of the park and onto the streets of New York? What ifâ€¦

"Right, let's split up. Woof, go and tell Crissy and the others that Samuel's disappeared. I'll go with Jeanie towards the pond."

Hud had this all under control. In his serious moods, he often reminded Jeanie of a commanding officer in some military unit. The pair started off on the winding path towards the pond. It was a popular place for both residents and tourists; a place where the hustle and bustle of New York could be left behind. They stopped for a moment, watching a group of schoolchildren feeding the ducks.

"I guess our best bet is to split up from here and meet in the middle," Hud shrugged, giving Jeanie a sympathetic look.

She nodded and turned right, picking up her pace. The worries that had immediately filled her head just fifteen minutes ago arose again.

How could she be so foolish? It hit her then that she was already failing to protect her son, the promise she had whispered in his ear just shortly after his birth. Perhaps her parents had been right to throw her out, adamant that she couldn't handle the responsibility of caring for a child, when she led a lifestyle which was so carefree and exempt of rules and any real structure. They wanted no involvement, as they knew that with this lack of responsibility would lead to them having to intervene and have the child forced upon them. The girl now truly realised just how selfish she had been and how ungrateful she had been to them, her parents who had striven to raise their daughter and give her every chance of success, only for her to rip that all down by becoming another teenage pregnancy statistic.

Continuing down the path, scanning the faces of the toddlers she passed, she still found herself praying that Samuel was safe. She found herself thrusting away those bitter thoughts. No. She would have no regrets. Her son may have been a mistake but that did not stop her loving him unconditionally. It is wasn't for him now, Jeanie was certain she would not have the motivation she now had for living every moment, appreciating what she had and the people she had with her. Samuel was her world.

Just then, she stopped in her tracks and those thoughts dissolved. Immersed in her thoughts, she had wandered off the path that circled the pond and was now walking up the grassy slopes towards the zoo. Something had caught her eye. She felt her insides begin to churn and twist, her heart hammering uncontrollably in her chest, the sound filling her ears. The girl paled.

She screamed.

End  
file.